

October 13 2005



Serving Members
Since 1920

To: **Jim Kempton, Chair**
Forum on Transportation Investment

7155 W. Denton Street
Boise, Idaho 83704
208 / 342-9391
Fax 208 / 342-0085

During the past year AAA Idaho and the 60 or so members of the **Forum on Transportation Investment** have had an excellent opportunity to learn more about Idaho's transportation infrastructure and to offer their views about its future. Your leadership and my respect for the process, including working with able professionals H.W. Lochner, Inc. (Dwight Bower) and Tom Warne & Associates make any criticism of the Forum sound either off-target or short sighted. However, my company does have concerns with the direction this project appears to be heading.

After months of laying credible groundwork, it appears a final Forum report to the Board and subsequently to the Governor may look more like a two-dimensional wish list for transportation funding requests to legislators, instead of a blueprint that spans 30 years, one that causes us to rethink the way we look at transportation. For instance, much of the focus of the most recent two meetings has been on revenue sources, when it's rather clear that a vision blueprint must be based on equitably assessing taxes among the several beneficiaries including property owners, businesses and different classes of highway and transportation users. The advisability of relying largely on gas tax increases in light of the volatile fuels marketplace is one example of how the final recommendations could be off course.

A Forum session this summer which addressed pros, cons and comments on various funding options seemed fairly ineffective. Most, if not all of the options, got little more than cursory examination by the whole Forum in an afternoon roundtable exercise. Apparently, few of the members responded for additional feedback after that meeting. Then, at the September 28 meeting in Post Falls, the entire group was handed 'stars' to vote for their top five funding choices in a facilitated exercise. The process seemed stilted, as we were all directed to vote for a category of funding options deemed by organizers as most promising. That exercise left me thinking the final recommendations will not reflect the best collective thinking by Forum members.

While I tend to agree with the direction of some obvious funding choices, I'm troubled that the facilitated process appears to be taking us down a predetermined route. As I tried to express in the group discussion, I think there's probably a better way to determine the value of the many funding options without having members affix stars on the top five favorites.

Let me enumerate a few examples of concerns our company has with the Forum process:

1. Few of the Forum members appear to support the needs assessment process and its results, even though most would likely agree transportation is under-funded.
2. Subsequent actions by H.W. Lochner and the Forum leadership that found a new way to reach the \$20 billion price tag identified in the needs assessment appeared too contrived.
3. The sheer size of the group means that a roundtable discussion, even with a facilitator present, is not effective.

Continued

4. The tendency for members to lobby for positions in their own best interest is divisive and limits the ability to work toward a group vision. It's quite clear, for example, that the trucking industry thinks it pays more than its fair share and that motorists should pay more for everything.
5. Obviously, as has been stated previously, the group's final recommendations will be based on consensus, not necessarily agreement by all members on all issues. However, at least at this point in time, it does not appear that the recommendations will be directly supported by the underlying assumptions.
6. The efforts to date appear to focus primarily on revenue options. Legislators will likely want to know ways to stretch existing revenues, to save with improved planning and to find various financing tools before raising taxes or creating new ones. They will want to a comprehensive plan that requires everyone's best efforts, not just a higher price tag for the motoring public.
7. Per an earlier note I sent, AAA Idaho believes a more effective way to rate and analyze all the options would be to score each of them with a matrix approach using a variety of factors including: political likelihood of passing, potential for public support, statewide impact, local impact, and the potential for improved mobility. Few ideas can raise millions of dollars, but the process should be able to rate every idea on its merits.

I suspect many of these questions will be addressed in the final meetings, but it may be useful to discover if other Forum members share any of these concerns before a final report is issued. Our organization feels it must be able to defend the final recommendations to our more than 70,000 Idaho members and to the motoring public at large. To do that, the process must intuitively support the conclusions in a very direct manner.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely,



Dave Carlson
Director of Public & Government Affairs
AAA Idaho
208-658-4401

cc: Dwight Bower, (H.W. Lochner, Inc.)
Tom Warne, (Tom Warne & Associates)